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<http://s.tt/1oC1N>  
[lorettalohman@gmail.com](mailto:lorettalohman@gmail.com)  
[loretta.lohman@colostate.edu](mailto:loretta.lohman@colostate.edu)  
[www.npscolorado.com](http://www.npscolorado.com)  
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CleanTechnica

Busted, Part Deux! Fracking Chemicals Found in Wyoming Water Supply

September 28, 2012 By Tina Casey

With the release of a new study on water contamination in Pavillion, Wyoming the U.S. Geological Survey has just put its two cents into the debate over whether or not the natural gas drilling method called fracking puts water supplies at risk. The results do not look good for the natural gas industry. The findings, which appear to confirm an earlier study of water contamination in Pavillion by the U.S. EPA, provide more hard evidence that the chemicals used in fracking are getting into drinking water supplies.

Fracking, Water Contamination and More

Fracking involves pumping a chemical brine underground in order to shake natural gas loose from shale deposits. The water supply at issue in Pavilion is groundwater, or water from wells used by residents, but groundwater contamination from drilling is only one of several water issues linked to fracking.

Another issue is the potential for surface water contamination caused by fracking fluid escaping from the drilling operation, from trucks, from the large lagoons used to store spent fracking fluid, or from the illegal disposal of spent fluid.

That could affect nearby properties, including residential grounds and conservation areas as well as farmland, streams and rivers

The use of injection wells to dispose of spent fracking fluid has also given rise to a connection between earthquakes and fracking, including earthquakes that are large enough to be felt on the surface.

## Fracking in Wyoming and Beyond

Fracking is not a particularly new method of drilling, but until recently it was mainly confined to underpopulated areas. Evidence of water contamination, other than anecdotal evidence, was nearly impossible to collect because the gas industry had won exemptions to standard federal regulations that would have required it to disclose the substances used in fracking fluids.

That explains why, for example, the residents of Pavillion have been reporting a suspected link between nearby fracking operations and polluted drinking water wells since the mid-1990's with no action from federal agencies.

That has been changing under the Obama Administration, which has been steadily putting pressure on the industry to identify the chemicals in fracking brine.

Another change has come with the development of vast, newly accessible gas deposits in the Marcellus Shale formation, which cuts across high-population areas, including parts of New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, where isolated episodes could more easily swell into the public radar.

## USGS Fracking Report and Gas Exports

The USGS report comes at an especially bad time for the gas industry. New supplies in the Marcellus and elsewhere are competing with traditional gas states in the Midwest, and legislators from that region have been furiously lobbying Congress to expand the market by allowing them to increase exports overseas.

Our friends over at The Hill have been following the legislative aspect of the story closely and they report that another group of lawmakers is lobbying just as hard for more study of fracking risks before any increase in exports is allowed.

The Hill's Zack Coleman notes that in a letter this week to the Department of Energy, the group stated its concern that more exports would not only come from conventional wells, but from increased fracking activity, "thus threatening the health of local residents and jobs."

The legislators raise the issue that to accommodate the export market, farms and local property values would be threatened, and domestic consumers and manufacturers would pay higher prices for electricity.

Encana, the Canadian company that owns the Pavillion wells in question, pushed back hard against EPA's findings last year, so stay tuned for its response to the USGS report.

[IMAGE]Clean Technica (<http://s.tt/1oC1N>)

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Loretta Lohman, Ph.D.  
Nonpoint Source Outreach Coordinator  
Colorado State University  
Colorado Water Institute  
3375 W. Aqueduct Avenue  
Littleton, CO 80123 [lorettalohman@gmail.com](mailto:lorettalohman@gmail.com) [loretta.lohman@colostate.edu](mailto:loretta.lohman@colostate.edu) 303-549-3063 [www.npscolorado.com](http://www.npscolorado.com)